

THE PERIMETERS OF FAMILIAL AFFECTION: EXAMPLES WITH THE METAMORPHOSIS,
THE SOOTERKIN, AND "A VERY OLD MAN WITH ENORMOUS WINGS"

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ABSTRACT

This literary analysis—of Franz Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*, Tom Gilling’s *The Sooterkin*, and Gabriel García Márquez’s “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings”— asserts that unconditional love is not possible without a supernatural impartation, because all humans have their limitations. To further this claim, I dissect the most sacred of interpersonal dynamics, society’s subgroups—the family. The four guiding perimeters of affection are societal influence—its opinion of a person; money, financial prospect; communication aptitude, whether verbal and physical speech that is understood or enjoyed; and, lastly, aesthetics: are they nondescript or pleasant to the eye? These variables determine how long a person will stay in a family’s domestic space or their proverbial rolodex. These three texts have numerous similarities, most apparent is their each having a weird character interrupt a family’s domestic life: hyperbolic contingencies that highlight the causes of limited or temporal affection.

Table of Contents

	Page
Title Page.....	i
Abstract.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	v
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: The Domestic Lives of the Samsas.....	8
Chapter 2: The Home with a Seal-Child.....	20
Chapter 3: Staying on Pelayo and Elisenda's Yard.....	32
Conclusion & Further Correlations.....	37
Works Cited.....	43
End Notes.....	46

INTRODUCTION

Unconditional affection is a concept as fantastical as Life-Sized Bugs, Old Winged Persons, and Human Seals. Yet many families all over the world and through time—now and in decades past—expect life-long devotion from their relatives. One example is the colloquial phrase “blood is thicker than water,” which illustrates a social conditioning to value one’s family more than others. While *The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka, *The Sooterkin* by Tom Gilling and “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings” by Gabriel García Márquez are set in various eras and countries, these three family- texts each show how appearance, interpersonal communication, earning-power, and community determine the extent to which one is cared for, even within family constructs.

In two of these three texts, which are speculated to be in Prague (*The Metamorphosis*) and Colombia (“A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings”), the locations are not actually specified. Additionally, while its place—Van Diemen’s Land (now Tasmania)—is named, *The Sooterkin*’s based-on-reality location is hyperbolized; moreover, the setting is not the novel’s focus. For these three literary works, and, so, for this thesis, the term “society” references humanity; these fictitious tales are not prescriptive to certain towns, cultures, or countries. Societies vary, of course, but their communal norms are adopted and enforced; their norms are a ubiquitous influence on the majority, which, in turn, outline how families should operate.

Societies encourage hierarchical and biased affection as well as communal tenacity (among those nationalistically, legally or biologically linked). Consequently, within each society there are subgroups, including families, which have more specific obligations. The encouragement of such exclusive groups (families) allows for domestic dysfunction. A *dysfunctional family* is “a family whose interrelationships serve to detract from, rather than

promote, the emotional and physical health and well-being of its members.... health care professionals define dysfunctional family as one in which the relationships among family members are not conducive to emotional and physical health” (“Dysfunctional Family”). So then, while familial loyalty is not necessarily evidence of dysfunction, neither is it necessarily an evincement of love.

Love is a projection-packed term. “What is Love?” was “the most popular search on Google” in 2012, according *The Guardian*’s “What is Love? Five Theories on the Greatest Emotion of all.” The same article goes on to quote Julian Baginni, a philosopher:

Love for parents, partners, children, country, neighbor, God and so on all have different qualities. Each has its variants – blind, one-sided, tragic, steadfast, fickle, reciprocated, misguided, unconditional. At its best, however, all love is a kind of passionate commitment that we nurture and develop, even though it usually arrives in our lives unbidden. That's why it is more than just a powerful feeling. Without the commitment, it is mere infatuation. Without the passion, it is mere dedication. Without nurturing, even the best can wither and die. (Al-Khalili et al)

There is pressure to forgive, to commit, and not to give up on one’s family. Interwoven in humanity is a notion that a person is capable of unconditional love, and that blood (or similarly bonded) family persons inherit this capacity and must provide this affection to their relations. Because of this ingrained belief to value familial connections more than relationships formed by complete choice, family members experience the ramifications, according to Annette Mahoney et al., who writes, in “Religion and the Sanctification of Family Relationships,” that “[i]ndividuals who knowingly breach a perimeter of a sacred relationship may experience more

anxiety, guilt, and defensiveness; their family members may [in turn] experience more intense negative psychological reactions upon discovering the violation” (230). The Family Tie, a quaint term, is then, for some or many, the Family Noose, Shackle, Chain, Lease, Anchor.

The Metamorphosis, *The Sooterkin* and “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings” are examples of how affection, especially within a close-proximity family dynamic, is both expected and conditional. Life is volatile. Blame it on weather, hormones, universal conspiracy, flukes, or emotional trauma, but each moment is an opportunity for circumstances to alter; thus, societies have their familial subgroups and the notion that these appointed members will remain steadfast to their respective households. Families are expected to assume such roles for one another: safeguards, respites, caregivers, forgivers, financial providers, and crutches throughout their entire life spans. The desire for family might be innate, as some wild animals travel in packs, and evolution makes sense of the bonds between offspring and the gravitation towards creatures with similarities; but this inclination is multi-layered not solely affection-based, and, moreover, is formed by means of expectation. In short, the three texts, with their overtly-unusual characters, demean a human’s claim to love unconditionally.

Each story has religious figures or elements; furthermore, each society within these fictitious works subscribes to, or acknowledges, a Christian God, a Higher-Power. Therefore, these texts also display the influence of religion on family. Mahoney explains:

Religion, however subtle or subconscious, is another familial bonding agent: For many people, family relationships involve more than biological, psychological and social processes; people often believe these bonds tap directly into the spiritual realm.... In short, people often view family relationships as sacred. Although religious traditions offer diverse prescriptive statements about what

constitutes a ‘good’ family member, a central theme emanates from most religions. (222)

Relationships are jeopardized by a large change, or repeated changes, and the response is to either adapt to, or abandon, the relation (similar to the “flight or fight” response of humans to conflict). Religion encourages one to battle rather than to flee:

Many religious traditions direct family members to care for each other with dignity and respect, make sacrifices for one another, and forgive one another for wrongdoings... Spouses in long-term marriages cite their convictions regarding the sanctity of marriage as the reason for the success for their relationships¹...and parents of children with developmental disabilities often vividly describe a spiritual dimension to their job as caretakers. (Mahoney 224)

Humanity has an array of religions and various convictions are held all over the earth, in present time and past. Believers and non-believers alike are affected by their society’s dominant religion (Christian or otherwise), including its statutes on family. Christian doctrine (e.g., the Bible) implies that its God sometimes grants humans (His devout followers) the supernatural capacity to love steadfastly. This tenacious affection is not explored outright in *The Metamorphosis*, *The Sooterkin*, or “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings”; however, by referencing Christianity the reader is encouraged to ponder that creed and can conclude there is no idyllic Christian to be found in these three texts. That is, not one human depiction in these three texts, religiously affiliated or not, is exemplary in steadfast affection. Family members let go, which evinces a perimeter has been breached or a person is not needed any longer in their periphery, their society, their immediate world.

Religious undercurrents aside, societies also have governments (ruling systems)

influencing and other means of peer pressure that factor into how people operate their households, and their families. *The Metamorphosis*, *The Sooterkin*, and “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings” all include abnormal creatures who interrupt domestic life, familial harmony, or daily routine. The parents in each work—the Samsas, the Dyers, and Pelayo/Elisenda—assume responsibility for their unusual transient: Beetle, Seal, Angel. Nevertheless, their decisions regarding them are motivated by physical aesthetics, communication aptitude, concern with monetary loss or gain, and preoccupation with societal perception.

A human seal is birthed in the Dyer home, a son becomes a beetle in a Samsa bedroom, and, out of all lands to visit, an Old Winged Man appears on Pelayo and Elisenda’s seashore. What matters to these three sets of parents is financial comfort and societal approval (i.e., to receive no blame or negative judgment). They do not want scandal or further impoverishment. However, the Beetle (Gregor), Seal (Arthur), and Very Old Man with Enormous Wings (Angel) invite and experience negativity by not blending. The Parents’ immediate world determines what is fashionable, beautiful, repulsive, delicious, edible, expensive, acceptable, shameful, and inferior. The blatant oddities of an in-their-space Seal, Beetle, or Angel highlight how decisions made by families are not strictly from affection (philanthropy or love), but affected by society’s approval or frowns. These animal-esque beings are housed because they are either assumed family or in the family’s domestic proximity, and so affiliated with familial obligation. This nearness has parents consider it their duty to shelter and feed (and, in two cases, profit from) their respective creature.

Some persons are not opposed to the familial odd in the domestic space when it is lucrative; that is, when something is at a distance, to be marveled at, to be defined as a rare deviation of nature. It is sometimes entertainment for audiences, who can stare at and scrutinize

with their curious eyes, for a small fee. In Katherine Dunn's *Geek Love*, for example, there "was a test garden, and the colors [of the flowers] were... designed. Striped and layered. One color inside the petal and another color outside.... The roses started [a father] thinking, how the oddity of them was beautiful and how that oddity was contrived to give them value" (9). This father, later, with his wife's consent, decides to mutate their future children deliberately for potential financial gain: "to breed his own freak show" (7); and, so, "the resourceful pair began experimenting with illicit and prescription drugs, insecticides and eventually radioisotopes" (7). This disturbed married pair desires to profit from objectifying the deformities of their family members. That story's couple, like the Dyers in *The Sooterkin* and the married Pelayo and Elisenda in "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings," gain an income from the weird figures they oversee; and the respective audiences are receptive to their creatures, because these odd persons are carnival-worthy or circus-like sideshows, showcases for arm's length entertainment.

Weird characters magnify circumstances, and the weird inclusions in these stories—*The Metamorphosis*, *The Sooterkin* and "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings"—reveal what happens when a person cannot hide or profit from their oddities, when society finds one "too other," (Rhodes and Westwood 242) and when a family's affection is tested. In the introductory chapter of the compilation *The Weird*, its book editors, Ann and Jeff VanderMeer, explain:

... a 'weird tale', as defined by H.P. Lovecraft in his nonfiction writings... is a story that has a supernatural element but does not fall into the category of traditional ghost story or Gothic tale, both popular in the 1800s.... Instead, it represents the pursuit of some indefinable and perhaps maddeningly unreachable understanding of the world beyond the mundane.... With unease and the temporary abolition of the rational, can also come the strangely beautiful,

intertwined with terror. Reverie or epiphany, yes, but dark reverie or epiphany....

[Weird tales] remain universal because they entertain while also expressing our own dissatisfaction with, and uncertainty about, reality. (xv)

The “universal” weird—examples herein with a seal child, insect-man, and caged angel—exposes humanity’s affection perimeters; and while all three stories surround families, which are subgroups that have less tenuous boundaries, the tested-result is still limited love.

Mass mentality perpetuates hierarchical affection by having Family as the superlative (i.e., *caring for one’s own*), and these three literary texts illustrate how families are influenced by aesthetics, the ability to communicate appropriately, finances, and societal (including its religious) opinion; they associate with their “weird,” in part, from a sense of obligation or for profit, factoring in their economic status and circumstance. To claim to still love someone, after saying goodbye, is not an accurate assertion if trying circumstances catalyzed the desire for distance. Affection shifts as perimeters are broached and crossed. And, even family members, with an ingrained inclination to commit, are incapable of discarding variables—looks, communication, finances, society—in their affection calculations.

Chapter 1: THE DOMESTIC LIVES OF THE SAMASAS

“[I]t’s a story of self-disgust, about the treachery of family and ... about terrifying arbitrary power”
– Carla Pereira and Mike Booth, “Literature: Franz Kafka.”

In Franz Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor, an unmarried son and brother, has a small existence. He is a door-to-door salesman, who counts down the years until he can quit: “If I didn’t have to hold back for my parents’ sake, I’d have given notice long ago—I’d have marched right up to [my employer] and given him a piece of my mind” (Kafka as qtd. in Bernofsky 23-24). Gregor is employed in an unpleasant occupation to pay his family’s bills: a routine his parents thought he would keep “for life,” as they assumed he had job security (46).

Gregor is their provider until, one morning, his exterior becomes that of a creepy, love-seat-sized, multi-legged insect. This metamorphosis has Gregor discover the limits of his family’s affection. He also learns his father has been lying to him, either by omission or deception, regarding the family’s financial state (62). Gregor, once he physically changes into an unsightly creature who “no longer resembles” human form, becomes a pauper, a dependent. His family endures his disturbing beetle-form but they also encourage his death by their neglect, disgust, and assaults. In short, their conditional love is revealed.

Gregor has a socially-conditioned loyalty to his family. He has been devoted as their income-producer (“the boy thinks of nothing but his job” [Kafka as qtd. in Neugroschel 126]) and is dedicated to them all the more within his bug body. For example, he endures physical abuse and still will not leave his family or their household until he is certain it is their want, that it is in their best interest¹. He has lived for them, toiling in a job and later, post-metamorphosis, he loiters and languishes in his room, fretful more for their well-being than his own, until he dies

because he cannot redeem himself in their eyes. Gregor's inherited relatives calculate him as ugly, unemployed (and unemployable), and incomprehensible. They, in their turn, "tolerate" his proximity because "family duty dictated" (Kafka as qtd. in Bernofsky 85). Gregor does not make an effort to leave his family and, as a result they all—Father, Mother, Sister, Gregor—suffer. In "The Limits of Generosity: Lessons on Ethics, Economy, and Reciprocity in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*," Carl Rhodes and Robert Westwood write:

Prior to the metamorphosis Gregor and Grete seem to have been moved by unconditional sibling affiliation. ... Gradually, however, the support and care begins to weaken, becoming an obvious chore for the sister who no longer remembers or experiences Gregor's reciprocation of her care. This goes to extremes when the family come to realise that Gregor is not going to transform back into human form.... his non-humanness and his alterity escalate such that Grete and the mother find it increasingly difficult to relate to him ... as family member, as he is no longer recognised as a fellow human. Extreme alterity does not spawn ethics in this case in that Gregor has lost his face, lost his humanity and as such has exceeded the limits of generosity. (242)

Gregor's family is hopeful he will change back to the blend-with-the-masses human he was before, and such hope has his family not discard him for some time (242). However, eventually, without his capability to earn income or communicate favorably, coupled with his long-standing repellent appearance, they decide they have nothing to gain, for there is no reciprocity (242). The family remains in their too-large home until Gregor's death, and soon thereafter make plans to move into "a new apartment... a smaller and cheaper but more convenient and above all more practical flat than their current one, which had been picked out

for them by Gregor” (Kafka as qtd. in Bernofsky 117). Notably, the family opts to downsize when the financial burden lies with them rather than solely Gregor.

Gregor might have had an unreliable worldviewⁱⁱ before he became a beetleⁱⁱⁱ; but, regardless, his bug-inclinations (such as wall climbing and spoiled-food eating) do not adhere to his society’s standard of acceptable, or usual. In her article “Who Identified the Animal? Hybridity and Body Politics in Kafka’s ‘The Metamorphosis’ and *Amerika (The Man Who Disappeared)*,” Melissa De Bruker highlights differences between Gregor and his familial housemates:

a smell of decay [in Gregor’s bedroom] makes breathing unbearable [for his sister, and] suggests that Gregor’s perspective might be limited. He may even lack common sense and a sensitivity toward others or, vice versa, his ideals, behavior, and notion of physical appearance may have become outdated. From the point of view of oppressive familial structures, it is not surprising that Gregor has transformed into an indefinable insect-like creature. (194)

Gregor is changed: his tastes, preferences, behavior, his aesthetics. Gregor also violates perimeters when he leaves his bedroom in his insect façade during his sister’s music performance, while house lodgers are present (Kafka as qtd. in Bernofsky 100). He erroneously believes there is a chance he could lure and keep his sister in his outcast-lair (Kafka as qtd. in Neugroschel 176).

Along with this delusion, he decides not to crawl; or attempt to fly away from the household,^{iv} which Vladimir Nabokov has stated as an option:

Curiously enough, Gregor the beetle never found out that he had wings under the hard covering of his back. (This is a very nice observation on my part to be

treasured all your lives. Some Gregors, Some Joes and Janes, do not know that they have wings). (Nabokov as qtd. in Nervi)

This passivity is a learned habit, an inclination not to challenge his circumstances or those in authority/control, or even the majority's opinion. Gregor does not escape his job when he has the choice, and he does not leave his bedroom when he does either. He decides—as he was conditioned—to be involved with his family to death, to be devoted. He will not explore other life options. He will not even escape his father's chasing him in a bug-like manner, because the act would be too overtly abnormal: "Gregor remained at floor level... as he feared his father might consider it particular wickedness on his part if he were to take refuge on the walls or ceiling" (Kafka as qtd. in Bernofsky 83). Gregor could be viewed as exemplifying unconditional love, yet, more likely is how he fails to see other options.

There is an expression that "the poor are crazy, the rich just eccentric."^v Had Gregor possessed a cushion of money, he might have been humored, lived more comfortably within his family's household, mingled as a large insect; but, as a frightening, unusual freeloader, he is a shameful burden and construed as deranged or, at least, viewed as more foreign than relation, and thus deemed out of place. De Bruyker writes: "A pet (cat, dog or even mouse) could still be linked to the family home. Bugs, on the contrary... need be extinguished" (194).

Looks and the benefits they offer determine worth, for both animals and humans, and, too, the degree of their acceptance. Gregor is roughly the dimensions of a love seat (Kafka as qtd. in Bernofsky 55). Some people are upset by a bug the size of a quarter. Gregor's frightful size and non-beautiful exterior have him unwanted by society; his family is inclined to shun him as well. Inwardly, a version of Gregor is still there, but that does not manifest in a sufficient-enough, discernible-enough way.

Aside from aesthetics and his uselessness, Gregor falls so hard out of familial-favor because he cannot successfully communicate. In “Caring About Strangers: A Lingisian reading of Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*,” Ruyu Hung writes:

[Gregor] can no longer speak as a representative of the common discourse of rational culture.... He can no longer use the vocabulary in the literature available at public libraries.... Communication with common language discriminates those who are *us* from those who are not. ... The unintelligibility and inability to use language lead Gregor to lose his role in the human language game as well as a part of his family. The ‘family’ [in this context] does not only mean Gregor and Grete’s family but also the whole human society, the more circle of (rational) human beings. Gregor—this monstrous insect—the pseudohuman—is no longer one of human family and thus deserves no humane and ethical treatment. (439-40)

Since they do not understand him, their care lessens. If he could, Gregor might speak through a door, or from under a sheet, and so be treated in a kindlier fashion, but he cannot communicate in a human dialect. Cristina Nicolae, in “Franz Kafka’s *Metamorphic Prison*: The Door and the Window,” writes: “Language is seen [as] an attribute of humans and the loss of this ability underlines the very idea of loss of human condition/identity” (145). His family begins to not relate when they cannot comprehend his words, his verbal expressions, this, even before the sight of him post-metamorphosis.

At one point, in the first day of his transformation, Gregor might be speaking in a discernible hybrid of his native language, i.e., not in completely foreign sounds, yet those verbal attempts are not successful. John Updike, in “Kafka’s Short Stories,” explains: “He has a voice at first, ‘but with a persistent horrible twittering squeak behind it like an undertone,’ which

disappears as the story progresses” (126). His father speaks to his son in one instance but his “unbearable hissing” is not appreciated by Gregor; and Mr. Samsa’s subsequent “great uproar . . . yelling” is not aimed at conversation but to ensure Gregor return to his room (Kafka as qtd. in Neugroschel 138). Along with the family’s auditory confusion, while Gregor is capable of body language, he frightens others with his movements, and thus, Gregor fails in his attempts to communicate within understood routes.

If the Samsas did not feel obliged, guilted, as his immediate family, to allow Gregor to continue his residence in their home in his physically altered state, Gregor might go elsewhere, to focus on himself, explore, become introspective and adventurous. Yet he is trapped, as Edith Krause explains in “Wisdom and the Tightrope of Being. Aspects of Nietzsche in Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis* (1915)”: “Stretched thinly between beast and man, Gregor is an earthbound entity who showcases our isolated existence on a lonely path full of obstacles, packed with missed opportunities, and a void of absolute rewards” (28). Gregor believes that family is tied to one’s fate, so he must stay fettered to his relations, and not abandon or discard them; he settles for a domestic prison with a cracked open door, to watch—but not interface with—the household, because he is committed to his family. Thus, both sides of this surprising, unexpected, metamorphic change begrudgingly adjust, feeling that they must accept, as Rhodes and Westwood write:

For the rest of his family this is not just Gregor’s metamorphosis, but a metamorphosis of their relations with him; most especially [their] relations of exchange and reciprocity. Gregor’s transformation is one that moves him from being the person who they know as ‘one of them’ to being radically different, face-less and non-human. *The Metamorphosis* is a story of ethics, or more

precisely about the ambiguous and unbearable demands of ethics as they relate to reciprocity and generosity. (236)

If Gregor had not physically altered, or not lost his income as a result of his exterior change, he might have continued, until a farther-off death, to have a less-tense relationship with his family, yet “without any economic value and identification, Gregor can no longer exert an ethical demand on his family for reciprocation.... [H]e is just too Other” (Rhodes and Westwood 242). To be “too other” is to ask too much of a family member, with their natural human state, with their limited capacity to endure dramatic shifts.

Gregor is called “vermin” in some translations. Vermin are viewed as ruiners of things. It is a term heavy with negative connotation. Gregor is neither understood to be distinctly bug nor human. He is not regular, which disturbs his family and his society’s inhabitants. His surface layer is something persons cannot ignore. An excerpt of Franz Kafka’s “Wedding Preparations in the Country”^{vi} has an imagined man-as-bug situation similar to Gregor’s. An overworked, self-conscious protagonist, Eduard Raban thinks how “[o]ne works so feverishly at the office that afterwards one is too tired even to enjoy one’s holidays properly. But even all that work does not give one a claim to be treated lovingly by everyone...” (Kafka as qtd. in Stern 75). In his “tired” state, Eduard explains how he would like to handle the coming days:

...I’ll send my clothed body. If it staggers out the door of my room, the staggering will indicate not fear but its nothingness. Nor is it a sign of excitement if it stumbles on the stairs, if it travels into the country, sobbing as it goes, and there eats its supper in tears. For I myself am meanwhile lying in my bed, smoothly covered over with the yellow-brown blanket, exposed to the breeze that is wafted through that seldom aired room. ... As I lie in bed I assume the shape of a big

beetle, a stag beetle or a cockchafer, I think.... The form of a large beetle, yes. Then I would pretend it was a matter of hibernating, and I would press my little legs to my bulging belly. And I would whisper a few words, instructions to my sad body, which stands close beside me, bent. Soon I shall have done—it bows, it goes swiftly, and it will manage everything efficiently while I rest. (Kafka as qtd. in Stern 78-79)

Among the few interesting bits of this excerpt is “my sad body, which stands close to me, bent,” as, here, the body (in “the shape of a big beetle”) and the inner (truer) self are different entities, like Oscar Wilde’s *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*. Gregor’s body is only some of him, not him entirely; his human façade is the socially acceptable, assimilating, part; his soul is a “large beetle.”

Sarah Davidmann, in “Transsexual Experiences: Photography, Gender and the Case of the Emperor’s New Clothes,” cites Charles Taylor: “Our Identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves.” Gregor does not enjoy his life before his exterior changes. However, he does not like his life after his transformation either, especially because society shames him in his new form. Stanley Corngold, in “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Vermin: Metaphor and Chiasm in Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*,” points out that, at the start, when Gregor first becomes a bug, he “felt perfectly fine” (Kafka as qtd. in Bernofsky 25). Before Gregor can dwell on or relish any positives of his new identity, he is bombarded with negative perceptions and dissuaded from displaying his new façade: “As a thing visible to others, his body is a cause of shame; in Gregor’s initial scrutiny of its possibilities, there was less shame

than curiosity. Therefore, it is the others' view of it that matters" (Corngold, "Thirteen Ways" 70). In the *Twilight Zone*'s Season 2 episode 6, entitled "Eye of the Beholder," a woman has tried plastic surgery eleven times to look like others in her society, so as to be deemed attractive. She tells a nurse, "I never even wanted to be loved, really. I just wanted people not to scream when they looked at me." That same nurse later discusses the patient to another nurse, saying, "If [I had her face] I'd bury myself in a grave someplace.... Some people want to live no matter what." Later, the doctors and nurses are shown to have pig-faces, whereas the patient (after that last failed operation) is still a stunningly beautiful human, still rejected and insecure because she is visibly dissimilar to her peers and so is sent to be in a "communal group of people with [her] disability" ("Eye of the Beholder").

Gregor's plight is universal. That is, possible and occurring in numerous societies, past and present. Gregor feels the pressure from the initial "timid [door] knock" (Kafka as qtd. in Bernofsky 26) onwards, to be who he was. There is overt societal displeasure evinced by his family, the household help, his former employer, and by the apartment boarders, toward the entity Gregor is now. Gregor is accepted as a bland, compliant paycheck earner, but not as a deformed and unemployed version of himself. The Samsas' dislike of Gregor's appearance arises from their social conditioning, their eventual dissociation, because he lacks income, the potential for pleasant conversation, and mainstream aesthetics. When Gregor does not re-become the nondescript figure he once was, he is unable to please his family and he dies (Kafka as qtd. in Neugoschel 182). Before his death amid the household transition, Gregor's mother and sister remove his belongings from his bedroom, to give him more room to move (155). In "A Consideration of Kafka's *Metamorphosis* as A Metaphor for Existential Anxiety About Aging," psychotherapist Ciaran O'Connor asserts the Samsas were exhibiting patience, acknowledging

this transformation may take a while to reverse: “[T]he family’s more central reasons for looking after Gregor... [is] that he might get better. In this they also show themselves as having no interest to try and engage with or grow more attuned to him as he is.” Later, Gregor’s previous possessions are either used by others or returned to his bedroom and not situated as before but crowded in along with other household rejects: “The family had gotten used to storing things [there] that could not be put anywhere else... for they had rented out one room of the apartment to the three boarders” (Kafka as qtd. in Neugroschel 172). Herr, Frau, and Grete Samsa dote on these three boarders, because these men represent normality and have money (Kafka as qtd. in Bernofsky 95-96). Whereas, eventually, among the “unnecessary,” near the garbage, Gregor is “left mortally exhausted and sad” (96).

His family takes no ownership for their part in Gregor’s demise, as Hung explains: “We excluders make every effort to justify our rejection of the stranger and so do[es] Gregor’s family” (441). Gregor is not allowed to leave his room. I discussed this text in class and a student pointed out how Gregor exits his room three times, and each time is forced back in. When Gregor first exits, he experiences a “powerful shove from behind, a genuinely liberating thrust that sent him flying, bleeding profusely, into the far reaches of his room... [and then] the door was banged shut” (Kafka as qtd. in Bernofsky 51). Upon his next emergence, he is abused with apples and, again, shut away (84-85). Later, on his third and last attempt, he is “locked” away (109). These discriminatory actions are not only against his beetle aesthetics, which frighten and shock, but because of the financial stress he causes. That is, “[Gregor’s] ‘value’ as a human is reduced to his capacity to produce money for the family” (Dodd 161), and since Gregor has lost his job, he is forced back into his room twice. And, the last time he comes out, Gregor is seen by the Three Lodgers, whom the Samsas have endured to supplement lost income, and who, in turn,

become disgusted by the Gregor sighting, leave without paying, and threaten to sue the family before they depart (Kafka as qtd. in Bernofsky 104). Gregor's father, mother, and sister reach their toleration limit, as their continued association with him again disrupts their financial state. Gregor is now referred to as "it" rather than by name or by a nominative pronoun:

'I will not pronounce my brother's name in front of this monstrosity, and so all I will say is: We must try to get rid of it. We have done everything humanly possible to look after it and put up with it; I do not believe there is anything we can be reproached for.' 'She couldn't be more right,' said the father to himself. The mother, still struggling to catch her breath and with an insane look in her eyes, began to cough into her muffling hand [thereby agreeing without disagreeing, a passive accomplice]. (Kafka as qtd. in Neugroschel 179)

Moreover, whether or not Gregor remains inside the beetle-body is decided, as his family lays verdict that he is already dead or gone, as they cannot stand the implications of his continued presence (Kafka as qtd. in Neugroschel 180); they no longer care. This climactic incident, the one that has brought Grete and her parents to this breaking point, is catalyzed by Gregor's aesthetics, his inability to communicate, the repulsion he causes outsiders (society's barometer) and the way their negative judgment influences the Samsas' income. The Samsas' final decision "to get rid of it" (180) is propelled by Grete, Gregor's once beloved sister, an act emphasizing how even well-intended familial affection has its limits, perimeters not to be often crossed or neared. O'Connor writes, ^{viii}"*Metamorphosis* ... warns us that there are those in the world that will make the assumption that a change in our situation in some way removes us from them as human beings."

Grete, who has endeavored to love Gregor despite his change, cannot remain steadfast.

Her eventual rejection of Gregor exemplifies how there are conditions to remaining in a loved one's periphery. In the end the focus is on Grete, who is the healthy, young relation with financial prospects (Kafka as qtd. in Neugroschel 188). She is hireable and marriageable (188). She no longer needs, and so lacks the desire for, Gregor to remain connected to her or her relations. Grete now experiences only the emotional burden of him and with no financial compensation or pleasantness, from neither the sight of or encounters with him, their relationship declines. In "Transforming Franz Kafka's 'Metamorphosis,'" Nina Pelikan writes, "Traditionally, critics of 'Metamorphosis' have underplayed the fact that the story is about not only Gregor's but also the family's and, especially, Grete's metamorphosis.... It is she who will ironically 'bloom' as her brother deteriorates" (Straus 652). Gregor has nothing more to offer – his society or his family; Grete does.

Chapter 2: THE HOME WITH THE SEAL-CHILD

A promiscuous wife, in Tom Gilling's novel *The Sooterkin*, supposedly has a child who looks and communicates as a seal would. That is, the creature does not hand-sign or speak in human dialect and lacks a human shape. The impoverished Dyer family profit from the widespread assumption that the seal is their biological relation. With its absurd scenario, *The Sooterkin* is exemplary in revealing underlying motivations and conditions of familial affection, especially concerning those who share a domestic space. That is, the seal is metaphoric fodder for how exteriors, money, interpersonal communication, and peripheral community impact familial relations.

There is some haze surrounding this seal-child's birth, starting with Mrs. Jakes, the midwife, who has "her bag of tricks" and could have switched a human newborn for a small seal. For example, the story's reverend, Mr. Kidney, talks with Mrs. Jakes and "looks over his shoulder and is puzzled to see a seal pelt hanging from a nail behind the door" (72); the inclusion of this detail implies Mrs. Jakes could have, indeed, obtained a seal pup from places other than Sarah Dyer. Then there is another delivery-room witness, a convict at a window, spying in, who thereafter runs to inform wealthy persons in hopes of obtaining money for his gossip report (24-25). Sarah Dyer, however, claims the weird surprise is hers and believes the situation is God's doing: "[I] would sooner die in my sleep than give birth to a monster but if God has sent it... I cannot turn the mite out.... If I didn't almost die of fright at the sight of it" (29). Yet others wonder if this seal is an actual person underneath an animal facade. Mrs. Humphrey, the police chief's wife, for example, "is certain something suspect has happened" (31). Among the theories, Arthur, who is proclaimed a boy "although its sex isn't [made clear]" (75), is said to be the result of a sad pregnancy, or a fluke due to scallop consumption (202); or his seal-likeness is a result of

Sarah having “often dreamed of [seals], as her brother in Scotland is a sealer, and has spoken of joining her in Van Diemen’s Land” (82); or else, Arthur is “punishment for some wicked perversion” (48). To add to the ambiguity, it is unclear if Arthur’s father is Sarah’s husband, as she has had an affair so, then, the lineage of the father is unexplored. As rumors circulate, Sarah Dyer solicits, and receives, money from investigators to “prod” her post-pregnancy body (66-67). Later, town members pay to view Arthur—the human guised as a seal: to hear him bark-sing and display other evidence of his trainability.

Arthur is sometimes called a Sooterkin, which, according to William Dyer, his supposed father, is “a saucy creature... that comes on a woman when she’s expectin’, and has queer habits and a tail and is written about by parsons” (102). A.W. Bates, in “The Sooterkin Dissected: The Theoretical Basis of Animal Births to Human Mothers in Early Modern Europe,” cites “John Maubray’s description of the sooterkin, [as] a strange animal born to human mothers ... [which] provoked ridicule when it was published in 1724.” In his book, *The Female Physician*, Maubray, an MD, a “man-midwife and teacher of midwifery,” includes “a short passage in which he claimed to have delivered a Dutch woman of a strange animal” (Bates). An excerpt of Maubray’s book, according to Bates, reads:

... a *Monstrous* little *Animal*, the likest of any thing in Shape and Size to the MOODIWARP; having a *hooked snout*, *fiery sparkling Eyes*, a long round *Neck*, and an acuminated *ShortTail* of an extraordinary *Agility* of FEET... runs up and down like a little Daemon, which indeed I took it for, the first time I saw it....

Bates adds, “Maubray did not use the word sooterkin in his account of de *suyger*, [because] he was describing something that was already part of the English language.” He also cites the testimony of two other sooterkin accounts:

In 1654 John Cleveland [wrote] ... ‘Sooterkin, not unlike a Rat.’ ... [And] in her Midwives Book, published in 1671, Jane Sharp included sooterkins along with other animals generated in the womb: ‘(a)s for monsters of all sorts to be formed in the womb all nations can bring some examples; Worms, Todes, Mice, Serpents, Goronius saith, are common in Lumbardy, and so are those they call Soole kints in the Low Countries....’

Despite there being “scientific” documentation regarding the prospect of abnormal human offspring, with the unexplainable or confusing, God, an all-powerful universal influence, is often brought into the fold. Thus, it is fitting that there is religious contemplation in *The Sooterkin*.

The supernatural is connected to both Christianity and the fantastical island on which he lives, yet Reverend Kidney perseverates in questioning whether or not Arthur is human: “[H]e has seen miscreations before—infants without limbs, without eyes, with cleft palates or ears like mushrooms—presented to him matter-of-factly for burial” (Gilling 60), yet he “is afraid of looking on the creature and feeling not awe at the supreme mystery of God’s purpose but dismay at some clever piece of sorcery” (71). In the end, the chaplain admits, God could have allowed the animal to come from the woman, but “more in the nature of a theological puzzle than a miracle” (99, 100, 175). Franz Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis* also has religious mention and encourages the question, how could a person (Gregor Samsa) gain such an improbable, abnormal guise? Bernofsky explains Gregor’s transformation is “supernatural”:

unlike the English ‘metamorphosis,’ the German word *Verwandlung* does not suggest a natural change of state associated with the animal kingdom such as a change from caterpillar to butterfly. Instead it is a word from fairy tales used to describe the transformation.... [And] its first definition in the *Oxford English*

Dictionary is “The action or process of changing in form, shape, or substance; especially by supernatural means.” (“On Translating Kafka’s ‘The Metamorphosis’”)

The supernatural is tied to the spiritual realm (as is the angel from Gabriel García Márquez’ “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings,” which will later be discussed); and, within these texts, the Christian religion is specifically mentioned. There is no mention of ministers in *The Metamorphosis*, but the absence of scientific or spiritual discussion has the words “thank God” and a Catholic-reference stand out all the more, when uttered in the Samsa household. Once the family discovers that Gregor is dead, the response is this: “Well, said Herr Samsa, ‘we can thank God for that!’ He crossed himself and signed the three women to do likewise” (Kafka as qtd. in Lloyd 93). The Samsas interpret that God has overseen their plight and eventually unyokes them of their Gregor burden.

There are a few reasons that Arthur’s situation is superior to Gregor’s lot: he is more attractive and innocuous-looking, according to societal opinion, and he does not incite reactions that incline persons to shun him. Matthew Powell, in “Bestial Representations of Otherness: Kafka’s Animal Stories,” writes:

The animal story relies upon the notion that animals have specific, predetermined characteristics (e.g., dogs are obedient and apes are mimetic by nature), whereas humans are a dynamic complex of characteristics. The projection of animal characters onto human situations and predicaments allows for a measure of clarity on our own existential dilemmas... (130)

Seals thought to be human, the Dyers discover, encourage a clapping, impressed audience.

Locals are also accustomed to seeing them on their shores. Seals are marketable alive or dead,

unlike a numerous-legged Kafka creation. Bugs catalyze exterminator careers and insecticide creations, so to rid them from domesticated spaces; they are not wanted in homes.

The Sooterkin's Mr. Sculley describes himself as "a student" of physiognomy and believes "that a man's moral powers, his passions and sympathies, his affections and repulsions, are depicted on his countenance" (Gilling 35). Mr. Scully emphasizes how appearance reveals internal character: "Are we not accustomed, by habit and education, to use our eyes to deduce those inner properties which would otherwise be concealed from us?" (35) The inclusion of a physiognomy angle encourages the reader to ponder the novel's character descriptions more thoroughly. For example, the peeping tom witness is described with "a thin, hatchet face with sharp yellow teeth and eyes scrunched up like oysters" (22). How well does he see with those eyes? Is his perspective trustworthy? And, "hatchet" implies violence; and, moreover, later, he is described as an "emaciated figure" who "slithers[s]" (22). Such descriptions imply he is hungry, does not have regular food, and is like a snake, with all its connotations besides. Whereas the Dyer seal is an affectionate "runt"-sized "monster" with "big round eyes" (29, 40, 66, 86); and he is "the perfect likeness of an infant seal in the rudest of health" (80). Arthur, disguised as a seal pup, is not ostracized, in part, because his outside is thought to reveal a likeable child who is trapped underneath. Gregor, however, is sequestered in his room because his exterior represents or conjures antagonistic notions. Both narrative communities reveal their perimeters of affection, which, in turn, influence each family's home. Arthur's society accepts him with favorable curiosity, while those in Gregor's world revile his exterior and take away his income and prospects.

Arthur is called a "varmint" (115) but Sarah Dyer retorts, "He's none of your American varmints, mister, and I won't have him called one" (115). To her, a person from another society,

an outsider not of her communal family, misinterprets her unique son, and she validates Arthur. Gregor's mother does no such thing for her son, a "monstrous vermin" (Neugroschel 117). She only coughs when their family decides Gregor must finally be "rid of" (Neugroschel 180), disposed. Vermin are "people perceived as despicable and as causing problems for the rest of society," according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*. And, although, both human-animals are identified, on a surface read, as verminous, Arthur, unlike Gregor, is associated with money, assumed by aesthetics to be non-*predatory*, bark-sings (communication), and, so, is beneficial for their family (money) and society (entertainment). Also, a seal is a familiar animal to the town's inhabitants. So then, Sarah embraces Arthur in her home. She even breastfeeds Arthur (Gilling 31), and when she hears an audience, a "crowd" nearby, she fully affirms Arthur as her biological child, saying,

'Praise God, sir, a woman's womb is a blessed thing and only He knows what'll come out of it and how many heads it'll have and who's to say what's normal, sir, when we're banished here with naked savages and will never see London again and there's unicorns growing in the woods with half their legs missing and what'll He send us next.' (59)

Sarah lives in an environment in which both the mythical and the mundane exist in the open, and so her abnormal child incites intrigue, whereas Gregor's world lacks imagination and influences his family accordingly.

This *Sooterkin* world, this Hobart Town on Van Diemen's Land in the early 1800s (colonial-era Tasmania), is a penal colony. That is, a sizable number of its persons ignored their former society's rules, and as they adjust to a foreign-place, there is an acknowledgment they will encounter the unusual. Also, important to note is that Arthur arrives on scene in 1821, a

transitioning historical time, according to Tom Lawson's "A British Genocide in Tasmania":

[b]y 1819 both the indigenous and the settler populations appeared to have been about the same at approximately 5,000 each. This figure reflects a massive decline among the indigenous community during the first decade of British settlement.... By 1830 the settlers and their descendants had swelled massively to around 30,000. Such rapid growth brought with it increasing conflict with the indigenous community as more and more of their land was taken from them. A campaign of resistance began in 1824. (19)

Lawson also states, "[T]he destruction of the vast majority of indigenous peoples" began in 1804 (18), and that "...the settlers... captured some of the indigenous children from the group and attempted to preserve the remains of the dead in the name of science and curiosity.... And [later] there are signs that indigenous children continued to be stolen" (19). Arthur is born into a novel that references a once-real *Hobart Town Gazette* as its periodical and includes based-on-real neighbors, who are also "curious" about people different from themselves; so much so, they, too, are capable of snatching children not their own. e.g., Arthur's kidnapping.

In *The Sooterkin* and in historical fact, persons of Van Diemen's Land are distinguished between those who commit(ted) crimes and those who enforce rules. Segregation also occurs between the indigenous and the immigrants thereabouts, history states. The tone of *The Sooterkin* is irreverent, humorous, and its timespan is before the racial tension took an even bleaker turn.

Gilling, in a prefacing "author's note," states how:

some incidents and characters' names have been drawn from the columns of early colonial newspapers. [And that] Dennis Todd's book *Imagining Monsters* (1995) was a valuable source of information on sooterkins and other curious births, while

Johann Caspar Lavater's *Essays on Physiognomy* (1798) taught [Gilling] the finer points of that abstruse science.

Gilling bases and situates his story within a history-inspired realm, depicting how appearance, along with peripheral and selfish concern, dominates human treatment of others.

Gilling's setting choice shows how even in a world in which difference is prevalent and acknowledged as fact, prejudice persists. Van Diemen's Land has distinctly different persons and intermingling between segregated persons need be explained. Negative judgment due to physical appearance is a learned behavior^{viii}; and for Gilling to make comedic light of the pre-Tasmania landscape is either to be disrespectful of tragic truth or to point out how absurd it is to be so fascinated with different physiognomies and bodies, and subsequently to treat certain humans as freaks or subordinate. To have the Sooterkin arrive in a household of human criminals is to bring the creature's exterior dilemma into the Dyer family construct; displaying how societal views infiltrate domestic spaces and promote conditional, cautious affection. Arthur, with his "weird," exaggerates a family member's potential conflict, as something subtle might have taken years to surface—to become a blatant difference causing conflict, clash, and challenge.

Arthur leaves in 1821, and another Arthur, Governor George Arthur (in real-life) arrives soon after, perpetuating the battle between the Aborigines and settlers (Ryan) and the "strong desire for the settlers to have an island free of Aborigines" (Reynolds). In "Milton's Reformed Animals: An Early Modern Bestiary: Seal," Karen Edwards states, "When the seal appears again in *Paradise Lost*, it is as one of the creatures whose presence signals (or perhaps seals) the end of paradise.... [Adding, later:] the seal on its barren rock, like the Garden of Eden itself, is out of place, and in its dislocation, it tends toward the monstrosity of its companions, orcs and gulls that scream like harpies (99). Van Diemen's Land, like Eden,^{ix} has its fantastical and has its fleeting

potential for harmony. Moreover, the inclusion of a bizarre family member reiterates a theme of temporality; that is, affection is a conditional inclination and a person will let go of another when circumstances get too complicated. People will opt to communicate from afar, or content themselves with the memory of a former relation, rather than endure in dysfunction or fight to adapt and struggle to understand.

Arthur communicates his ability to understand human speech, i.e., his comprehension of his mother's wants, by learning tricks. His submission, his doing what he is told, is his work, and in exchange he receives room and board and good treatment. Arthur's compliance is what Rhodes and Westwood earlier discuss as adhering to reciprocity, the give and take. Babies, toddlers, children up to a certain age are not expected to earn a living, and even still, Arthur, a seal-pup, attracts money. His arrival brings substantial income with the prospect of improving the Dyers' economic status (Charles). Eventually, Arthur "brings in a steady stream of clipped pennies and battered sixpences, plus the occasional Dutch guilder and Spanish pistole.... [then] Sarah [had even] grander plans... 'I've a mind to put Arthur in a circus.... We must have our own circus'" (Gilling 87). Sarah Dyer, stirred by Arthur's profitability, creates one; and with "a sixpence a head for the chairs, and tuppence for the benches, Sarah expects to make a pound a week—a sprightly income that will have them living in bricks and mortar before next winter" (89). Later, the cost of admission to The Seal Show increases to "tickets 1 shilling" (96). In short, Arthur proves himself a cash cow, which is a prominent reason he is treasured by his mother.

Sarah is protective of Arthur, her income source. She successfully fights off Arthur's murder (attempted by "an old warty octopus") with a "piece of driftwood" (97). Eventually, however, he is taken, so as to make another person wealthier (128-129); Sarah reacts by ignoring

Ned, her other son, who is with Arthur when he is stolen: “She can’t even look at [Ned] without crying. She takes to her bed and won’t get up, and won’t eat, and won’t open her mouth except to wish she was dead. The blackest oaths are lost on her husband...” (146). She is upset at the loss of Arthur; but her grieving is great, possibly, because her financial future is now uncertain. Later, after Ned leaves in search of Arthur, it is written: “[Sarah Dyer] mourns the loss of her children.” This reaction could be construed as true familial grief, but here, still, she could also be sad that her prospects—from what her children could give her (emotional and/or financial support), in the present and as they age—are out of her hands. For note, Ned was working before Arthur was born “offer[ing] his services, at a halfpenny a time, to [those] who can’t read for themselves” (8).

When Arthur later escapes from kidnappers and swims away, life moves on for the Dyers. Sarah becomes pregnant again and Ned publishes a book “at the cost of a shilling” each (211-12). It becomes too challenging to keep captors away from Arthur. It is easier to have “normal” children, children who do not stand out, but who also bring in money, such as from Ned, with his book, *Memoirs of a Boy*, which likely mentions his seal brother, Arthur; and Sarah Dyer, again pregnant, will birth another child—who, too, will eventually aid with family income. The Dyers move on; having let the seal swim away. Yet, whether for Arthur’s own good or otherwise, to allow him to leave is to discard any supernatural attribute he has and to clump him with the familiar—the other seals that look like him.

The Sooterkin is laden with foreshadowing and constant reminding of the animal focus, which is Gilling’s way of highlighting the human-animal similarities; whereas humanity generally dwells on aesthetic differences and segregations (e.g., hierarchies) between human, between animals (e.g., pets or food), and between humans and animals. However, Sarah’s behavior is, at times, likened to that of animals’: “thrashing like a calf being dragged to the

butcher's yard" (15); she cries— "like the howl of a lost calf" (146); and she "wrapped herself around [Ned] like an octopus" (151). William Dyer, Sarah's husband, is described as a "spidery figure," who has "something verminous about him, a suggestion of infestation emphasized by his habit of stopping abruptly in the middle of the road and scratching his head" (2). Moreover, both the "normal" and the "weird" relations are held to similar affection standards in *The Sooterkin*.

William Dyer, from the start, is distant, cautious with Arthur: "not wanting to peer too closely at the thing his wife has brought into the world" (21). Later, he "keeps peering into the cot to see if it's still breathing" (66). He is said to be the father, though his wife had relations with Joshua Armstrong, a hangman, who gifted her a stolen "plum from the chaplain's tree" (68). William is a man often drunk (14, 195) who profits from Arthur (57). William and Sarah Dyer seek a nicer house by exploiting their fantastical creature. Once, after Arthur performs, William acknowledges his and Arthur's supposed biological connection: "[He] claps loudly: 'Bravo, Arthur, old son!'" (90). He is publicizing Arthur as family, yet, later, he "conspire[s]" to have Arthur kidnapped (196). William is valued less than Arthur, by his wife, presumably because he does not haul in money as the seal does and, instead, squanders income with his alcohol addiction. Both the unsurprising (William) and the weird (Arthur) relations are held to similar affection standards.

To further emphasize Arthur's biological connection with his family, and to humanity, Ned, Arthur's a-few-years-older brother, is also described with animal imagery; in one instance, he is "curled up like a prawn on an oily sheepskin, pink and wrinkly, shitsmeared, eyes pinched against the candlelight" (4); and in another, "mouth... agape, like a fish suffocating on a rock" (135). Ned, at first, is frightened when Arthur arrives (29), yet because Sarah Dyer is not keen on spending time with Arthur (86), aside from the obligatory and financially profitable times, the

two siblings bond, as two persons who spend extended time together are apt to do. Ned and Arthur grow close because of their parents' conditional affection.

After Arthur is stolen on Ned's watch, Ned "feels as though his heart has been pulled out whole" (146); Ned "never imagined until now that Arthur could be mistaken for a common seal, that the pup could end up clubbed and skinned like those in the harbour" (208). Ned believes Arthur to be his kin, but his sibling-affection is, at least in part, grounded in obligation. He sees Arthur as his brother though he is also aware there are consequences of not finding him. e.g., his mother's [financial] upset and the already-experienced domestic disharmony he experiences before going out in search of Arthur (146). His fondness for his seal sibling is also, partially, money-related, for example: "Sarah Dyer looks up from the ledger in which she and Ned are admiring the weekend's takings" (113), which has their family profit. In the end, Ned encourages Arthur's escape into the water, away from the money-hungry, and "wades in up to his waist and stands for a long time staring out to the sea" (210). Ned, while expressing loss, does not become overly emotional about Arthur's departure. Ned's affection is real, but it is never tested by time or continual proximity, and so cannot be deemed unconditional. Moreover, in the next section of the novel, there is a newspaper snippet explaining how Ned has published a book, profiting from Arthur, still.^x The Dyers shift focus to their other children, just as the Samsas do, because they have emotional boundaries.

Chapter 3: STAYING ON PELAYO AND ELISENDA'S YARD

Like the two narratives prior, Gabriel García Márquez' "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings" has a weird, strange, character present himself to a money-concerned family. A Winged Someone arrives in the "pitiful condition of a drenched great-grandfather" (García Márquez). This foreigner is, by some, thought to be an angel. The couple, Elisenda and Pelayo, upon whose property the foreigner is found, cage him, because Elisenda (like *The Sooterkin* mother) sees a financial prospect: she "got the idea of fencing in the yard and charging five cents admission to see the angel" (García Márquez). The Old Winged Man becomes their responsibility—and they lay claim on his profitability—because he is within their domestic space (on their yard); and, for subsequent years, he dwells in less than desirable housing to reinforce the temporality of their foster family situation. This foreigner, from heaven or otherwise, is not helped up off the crab-carcass ground.

The nearby homeowners, despite his wings, eventually view him as unthreatening and "familiar" (García Márquez) —*familiar* because he appears more human than otherworldly. They think him "a lonely castaway from some foreign ship wrecked by the storm," until a neighbor suggests he is a fallen angel and they should kill him (García Márquez). Instead of murder, Pelayo and Elisenda hold the being captive (García Márquez). They think to send him off "on a raft with fresh water and provisions for three days and leave him to his fate on the high seas," but then they see how passersby treat him, "as if he weren't a supernatural creature but a circus animal" (García Márquez). With this observation, coupled with an understanding that the Winged Man does not evoke fear, Pelayo and Elisenda see money signs, so they assume foster guardian roles. In turn, people travel and pay to loiter at the site of an Angel-Man. Pelayo and Elisenda thus trivialize the supernatural nature of the person they adopt into their family.

However, they acknowledge him as family, despite his finances, communication, looks and societal input affecting his sojourn.

The Old Angel is an ill-treated adoptee. Never invited to stay inside their original house or their eventual mansion home, Pelayo and Elisenda's charge remains in his assigned "dungheap stench[ed]" chicken coop. The Winged Old Man provides his foster family income, but he is still kept outside. This sequestering is likely because of his wings, which encourage his guardians to treat him as more animal than person. The decrepit angel is on the same hierarchical tier as a caged chicken, or a rope-leashed cow rather than a beloved domestic animal. His advanced age and lack of comprehensible speech are likely determinants or justifications as to why he is not inside their home (too much a burden); but he is not discarded beyond their periphery. From the time their child is a newborn until after "the child began school" (García Márquez), the Old Winged Man remains. Pelayo and Elisenda do not evict him even once the paying crowds leave because there is an obligation—just as with the Samsas and the Dyers, for once someone is associated with a family, there is a subsequent reluctance to discard those who were, however temporarily, permitted as a part of that intimate dynamic.

The angel's exterior attracts crowds and judgment—not love. While his apparent age rules out his being deemed a child, the Old Winged Man is under parental guardianship. His situation could be construed as "adult foster care," which is a similar familial dynamic. The Old Man is a foster family member with a physical abnormality. The problem with the wings is that they appear too natural (García Márquez); he is deemed a profitable, deformed burden. His guardians' inability to understand their dependent makes their dynamic that much more burdensome for the effort required, because the Angel/Man is not conforming, easy: "[People] act and respond to each other in the so-called proper way, a predictable way. But there are some

people who do not share the same language with us, who cannot be predicted. They are unpredictable, odd strangers and foreigners” (Hung). This story’s family situation shows how most people desire simple and beneficial relationships, or else they will encourage physical distance. Even within family constructs some members feel kindred while others interact like “odd strangers.” Some wonder if the foreigner speaks Norwegian or Aramaic in the Spanish-speaking land (García Márquez); and despite how Father Gonzaga thinks the foreigner should be fluent in Latin, “the language of God,” there is also the wondering if the foreigner is even religion-affiliated (García Márquez). The speculation of Norwegian, in this story’s context, implies that, aesthetically, along with the giveaway of his speech, the foreigner might look as though he is from another part of the world. That is, he appears—ignoring his wings and speech even—overtly different.

Had the protagonist shown up without visible wings, handsome and bestowing expected anointed utterances, he would likely have been better embraced. He might have been given a guestroom (maybe even regardless of a potential income). But that is not the story García Márquez has written. He has scribed a community, and a family specifically, interacting with a homely angel, and he documents everyone’s fading interest and irreverence. This story explains how even if God sent a supernatural being to one’s doorstep, to be part of one’s family, people would treat the entity with the same ingrained fickleness humans have toward one another. They would still hold tight to their ranking system; questioning, *how does this being profit me? Or, are they related to me? (If so, that would obligate me to house them....)*

Father Gonzaga, the religious figure within “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings,” (not including the prospect that the Old Winged Man is an angel) lacks supernatural love. He visits and examines the reputed angel, whom he deems a “pitiful man,” an “imposter,” and

encourages the congregated people to exude caution and prejudice toward the migrant (García Márquez). Father Gonzaga views the grotesque spectacle as “much too human,” neither known nor clean, and he urges people to keep a distance (García Márquez). Furthermore, the minister insinuates the foreigner is of the devil (García Márquez). Yet Father Gonzaga, as written, is a false Christian, as he does not model a biblical standard of affection. That is, by not treating the foreigner with love nor as equal to himself, he is contradicting his religion’s principles. The crux of Christianity is that God sent Jesus to die, to forgive humanity for their mistakes, and to prove His devotion; in turn, persons are encouraged to acknowledge that sacrifice, die to themselves, and love God first. If they do so, they thereafter possess a supernatural capacity to care and to pour out overt affection toward all persons, and be good stewards of land and animals. García Márquez wrote Father Gonzaga as a deluded figure who believes he has a relationship with God, while spewing skepticism rather than love. Regarding false teachers, such as Father Gonzaga, the Bible states, “Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles? And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness'” (New American Standard, Matthew 7:22-23). However, regardless of his sacrilege, no one listens to Father Gonzaga regarding the caged-winged-man, and they continue spectating.

García Márquez did not write a story about an Ambiguous Being and Just Anyone profiting at a roadside stage-show. He had a family as the focus, affected by a supernatural sojourner. Although Pelayo and Elisenda are selfishly motivated to adopt the Old Angel, they accept him as a disabled man (labeled such, as he is presumably unable to use his wings until the end of the story); they do not rush him off as time lapses forward. He is a tolerated family member until he chooses to leave. The narrator of “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings”

refers to the foreigner as an “angel,” a term that conveys, potentially, who this abnormal being really is. And, if so, García Márquez’ story illuminates how people are so caught up in their own interests that they belittle the supernatural. Moreover, the story depicts how communal influence compounds with self-interest, and without possessing a supernatural capacity to love, the result is conditional affection.

Had the Very Old Man with Enormous Wings not had questionable heavenly ties (along with being found by a family), he would have likely been ignored all together, for when another “weird” came along, “[a] traveling carnival arrived with a flying acrobat who buzzed over the crowd several times [...] no one paid any attention to him because his wings were not those of an angel but, rather, those of a sidereal bat” (García Márquez). As with the *The Metamorphosis* Samsas and *The Sooterkin* Dyers, Pelayo and Elisenda take what they can from their challenging family member and are fine when that member departs. These narratives emphasize how family members seek mainstream ease and will eventually dissociate from unpopular and unprofitable people, even if they are a relation.

CONCLUSION & FURTHER CORRELATIONS

The perimeters of familial affection, examples with a novel (based in Tasmania), novella (first written in German), and short story (translated from Spanish), are made evident with their using the “weird” as effective hyperbole; these three texts comment on humanity's prejudices and ways in which even families can be swayed by the masses. Ronald McFarland's “Community and Interpretive Communities in Stories by Hawthorne, Kafka and García Márquez” states: “The differentness of an individual somehow sets him apart from the community; the community isolates or in some other way repudiates that individual; the individual dies or departs without a fully satisfactory reconciliation with the community or without an adequate explanation.”^{xi} This outlier death (literal or otherwise) is an embedded fear; people understand to not go along with their society's expectations is to invite potentially extreme consequences. Gregor starves and dies when his family rejects him; the Old Foreigner flies clumsily away—not yet fully healed; and Arthur swims away to blend with other ocean creatures. These hybrid individuals illuminate how familial treatment, especially within domestic proximity, is dependent on acceptable aesthetics, successful communication, fiscal impact, and the dominant, influential, society. Beyond these three print narratives, there are many other depictions involving “the weird” and family, which touch on this opinion.

One such cinematic example is *Elephante* (2012), directed by Pablo Laurcen. In the short film a man becomes an elephant and, in turn, he loses his job, his wife, daughter, becomes a depressed fighting drunk, eventually seen as a menace to society. In the end, his young son accepts his change, and the elephant-man is put in a zoo, where society profits from his metamorphosis by his being a sight to pay to see. Each of the three narratives explored in this thesis has a set of parents and a child beside a blatantly unusual boarder: there is the sister, Grete,

in *The Metamorphosis*; the brother, Ned, in *The Sooterkin*; and the unnamed toddler of “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings”; and, like the son in *Elephante*, they are all inclined to accept the anomalies in their domestic, peripheral spaces. Yet these connections are temporal and represent a family member’s best attempt at affection. Grete, eventually, cannot endure Gregor’s impact on her financial and emotional wellbeing, regardless of their sibling history. Ned is affectionate, as he is expected to be toward a brother or loyal pet, but when Arthur leaves, life goes on, with Ned understanding Arthur’s departure is the best option for the seal lookalike. The Unnamed Child’s reaction to his Elderly Playmate’s departure is not mentioned in the García Márquez tale, implying it is negligible, not worth mentioning. And, in the short film, the elephant’s son visits him, but that is just it; he visits. Any undesirable family member can be endured, or enjoyed, on occasion. Grete, Ned and the Dyer Child are more receptive than their parents to the persons who appear like supernatural animals, because they are younger, not as weighed with financial or societal concern. Once Grete feels that monetary burden, and interpersonal shame, she—coming of age, turning adult—turns on her brother.^{xii}

Caterwaul (2012), a short film directed by Ian Samuels, also considers an animal transformation, which disrupts a domestic space. In this story, an elderly lobsterman takes home an affectionate lobster, which eventually grows larger and larger until it is human size and has subtle physical features of an elderly woman. Ostensibly, it is the supernatural manifestation of his deceased wife. At first the man is happy with the company, and treats the creature with care, even sharing a bed with the large crustacean. Yet, eventually, the hybrid wife is a burden. It becomes apparent she is forgetful and sickly, so he takes the disabled being out into the deep ocean, and, though she is still alive, throws her overboard.

These two animal-focused films display how persons treat animals differently from humans, even when those animals are maybe human beneath their facades. Laurie Shannon in “The Eight Animals in Shakespeare; or, Before the Human,” writes “[d]espite their alleged lack of soul, animals are called by the name of *anima*, the Latin noun for soul, breath, or spirit” (474). However, when encountering an exterior distinction, relations could feel quite justified in their cultivation of distance between the animal and themselves. Shannon discusses how the Bible does not mention “animals” but, instead, “terms like ‘creatures,’ ‘living things’ and ‘living beings’” (476), and she states that Shakespeare’s “two [of eight known] uses of the word [animal] involve persons failing a (gender-vexed and class-inflected) human standard” (476). Furthermore, in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*, he mentions “animals” three times (Shannon 476); and “[t]hese political animals are radical animals, claiming an authority beyond any human master. In Renaissance political theory, what is ‘worse’ than a usurper or tyrant?” (276). In short, Shannon is explaining how the term animal is layered with negative connotation. The aforementioned films, *Caterwaul* and *Elephante*, with their animalistic characters, show the emotional extremes of familial breakups: one story has a spouse cast away his dementia-plagued lobster-wife, despite having captured, nurtured, and, before, having encouraged her to stay; while in *Elephante*, the cohabitation of an elephant is never desired and ends with a spouse in a publicly-viewed cage.

Mankind appears to approve of broad distinctions of us and them; family and stranger; animal and human, yet before, long ago:

animals represented no single, philosophically invested category in early modernity; they instead suggested populations. English speakers almost never grouped together all the creatures we call (nonhuman) animals under that name,

preferring a more articulated list influenced by the cadences of Scripture and cognizant of plants and minerals as well. Second, their failure to group all creatures under animal evidences a different cosmology that whatever we might say about its hierarchy or rigidity, was not essentially binary in the way the modern duo of human/animal is. (Shannon 477)

These short films display how their relations entered another category, classification, and so they need not remain around the “normal.”

Three other movie examples, with the weird affecting family, without the animal-esque include *The Goonies* (1985), directed by Richard Donner; *Powder* (1995), directed by Victor Salva; and *Little Otik*, or *Otesanek*, (2000), directed by Jan Švankmajer. The last, a feature film, has a woman who wants a child so badly that her husband makes her one out of wood, and because she treats the hand carving as a baby, it becomes alive. Yet while it can eat and nurse from its mother, it looks more tree than human. Additionally, the parents must keep it out of public view because it is unsightly and eats people. The growing child puts a strain on the marriage and eventually eats its father. This depiction is hyperbolic and improbable, yet the film shows that when a family member does not conform to majority expectations, caring for that being becomes too great a challenge. In *The Goonies*, Sloth, a physically abnormal son and brother, is imprisoned in a basement by his family members because of his looks (and maybe, also for his means of communication). Sloth is poorly housed, abused and treated as lesser; he eventually turns on his biological relations and finds a new, kinder family. Thirdly, and similarly, *Powder*, in the narrative feature, after his biological father rejects him, is kept under the floors, hidden from everyone except from his grandparents, discovered only after their death. Presumably his ostracizing stems from his abnormal appearance and the potential gossip his

unhidden presence would bring. These cinematic mentions, while exemplary, are but a handful of texts touching on the universal plight that humans—even with their insular nooks (families)—have emotional limits that are revealed in the face of public scrutiny, monetary struggles, communication barriers, and unattractive exteriors.

Acknowledging the hovering theme (the circumstantial tolerance of families) makes clearer that humanity's selfishness, with its money-driven and outsider-opinion concern, catalyze individual decisions; because humans—without a supernatural impartation—are not capable of unconditional affection. One seemingly notable exception is depicted in the 1971 film *The Panic in Needle Park*, a tragically beautiful narrative of a codependent secular couple. They are each other's family in some respect, as Helen's parents are never seen (only evident in a letter) and Bobby's only proximal family, his brother, beds Bobby's girlfriend. Bobby and Helen discuss on more than one occasion getting married, though never make their nuptials legal. These two stand by one another despite prostitution (active adultery), heroin addiction, and jail-time (when Helen "ratted" on Bobby). Though these two are steadfast and loyal, their relationship could be interpreted as addiction rather than unconditional affection.

The Metamorphosis and "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings" and *The Sooterkin* criticize humanity (including the superlative dynamic—family), particularly for its selfishness. Kafka, García Márquez, and Gilling use prominent weird characters because if Gregor loiters in his room as a human, his neglectful situation could mean: "don't freeload"; and if the old man lacks wings or if Arthur's seal-features are less overt then their exploitations could be interpreted as commentary on migrant workers or anti-child labor, or any number of things; but the texts, as they are, with their weird characters and family constructs, illuminate the conditions of human affection.

In the Fran Estévez's short film *Metamorfosis* (2004), a subtitle reads: "[Gregor's family] kept the strange situation a secret, as if [Gregor] were ... a leprosy patient or something like this." In January 2017, I visited a "leper colony" in India, a sequestered place for those with Hansen's disease. They are called "untouchables" or "outcasts." I learned that those with the overt disease are ostracized from their families once their symptoms manifest, and sometimes, in turn, their dependent children, who do not have the condition, must live with their plagued parent in these impoverished colonies. The lepers' dwellings liken to prison cells. The spouses and other family members, besides the children, usually do not join the lepers, but remain in mainstream society, I was told. It was also explained to me that to assimilate back into society, these children-of-lepers will lie to inquirers and say they do not live in those relegated spaces while they are attending school; and, maybe, one day, if they want to rise above that nadir caste level, they will need to move away and never become found out for having the leper association. The families of *The Metamorphosis*, *The Sooterkin*, and "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings" want to belong in their respective societies. This desire for communal and internal peace, combined with the preoccupation of money, aesthetics, and a need understand, could have a familial relation—regardless of their societal affiliation—discarded because every interpersonal relationship has its conditions, its boundaries, its limits. Well, unless there is supernatural intervention.

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ⁱ Here Mahoney paraphrases and cites "Kaslow and Robinson 1996."

ⁱⁱ Melissa De Bruker comments on his reading material, providing it as further evidence of his limited scope: "Gregor's father is a fervent reader of newspapers; he himself reads magazine. Newspapers evoke an alertness to social change of which Gregor, however, fails to notice" (195).

ⁱⁱⁱ Vladimir Nabokov insists Gregor's new form is not that of a cockroach but of a beetle: "A cockroach is an insect that is flat in shape with large legs, and Gregor is anything but flat: he is convex on both sides, belly and back, and his legs are small. He approaches a cockroach in only one respect: his coloration is

brown. That is all. Apart from this he has a tremendous convex belly devided into segments and a hard rounded back suggestive of wing cases. In beetles these cases consel flimsy little wings that can be explained and then may carry the beetle for miles and miles in a blundering flight” (Nabakov as qtd. in Nervi).

^{iv} Also, Dodd writes, “A creature without species, there’s no reason why [Gregor] couldn’t have flown away, yet as the family sacrifice, he lingers grotesquely” (161).

^v Upon research, I discovered this quote has been attributed to Ellen Raskin, from her book *The Westing Game*. However, others, too, are credited, such as Sydney J. Harris, who, in his book, *Majority of One* (1957), writes: “A poor person who acts different is said to be ‘crazy,’ but a rich person who acts different is merely ‘eccentric’—a small personality quirk.” (For note, I heard the expression in nether place, but on a film; I forget its name.

^{vi} The comparison of *Metamorphosis* and this text, the idea, the pointing of the bug-story similarities, came from Corngold in his introduction of *The Metamorphosis*. (“Introduction.” Xi-xxi. Franz Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*. Bantam Dell: New York, 2004.)

^{vii} In O’Connor’s article, he, in this context, specifically, is making the case that Kafka’s story is a commentary on, “a parable about old age.”

^{viii} This is made evident in Jane Elliott’s 1968 Blue Eyes/Brown Eyes experiment, for one example.

^{ix} For side note, the idea of a lover stealing fruit from a religious man’s tree, before he gifts it to an adulterer (Sarah), who becomes pregnant with a seal, brings about Biblical pondering. E.g., Eden.

^x The contents of *Memoirs of a Boy* aren’t specified, but it likely includes stories about Ned and Arthur, as nothing else quite memorable or publishable has occurred in Ned’s life. Even the search party seemed more interested in finding Arthur than Ned (Gilling 166).

^{xi} While this article is not intended to be commentary on *The Metamorphosis*, *The Sooterkin* (though it is an analysis, in part, on “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings”) it is applicable for all three texts.

^{xixii} The subtitle of Gabriel García Márquez’ story “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings” is “a tale for children,” which implies the only people who can be reached, is the next generation.